

Consensus and Ideology in the Age of Jackson

Those who find striking contrasts in the beliefs and actions of the major parties tend to believe the Whigs and Democrats appealed to unlike constituencies. In this view, Democrats were led by plebeians, Whigs by aristocrats. The Democratic rank and file, whether in city or countryside, were allegedly much poorer than their Whig counterparts. Whiggery flourished where soils were superior. In the South it was most popular in the black belt, where plantations prevailed or where slaveownership was greatest. The religious diversity of the party memberships was also believed to reflect the social gulf dividing them. Denominations of high prestige thus aligned themselves with the party of Clay while their social inferiors chose Jacksonian Democracy. And where poor or ordinary folk voted Whig, as millions of them obviously did, a traditional interpretation explained the phenomenon in terms of an "economic dependency" that drew the lower orders to support their overlords.

According to the popular interpretation of American history that stresses the twin themes of continuity and struggle, the Jackson party took up where the Jeffersonians had left off in the never ending fight of the people against the privileged few. The Democratic party of Franklin Roosevelt's time would later fight the same good fight that had been waged a century earlier by the partisans of Old Hickory. The enemies of the people—whether Federalists, Whigs, or Liberty League—were also judged to be spiritually akin. Certainly Jacksonian campaigners regularly referred to their opponents, whether Whig, Antimason, or other, as "Federalists." There is no doubt the charge was an effective one, what with the deteriorating reputation of Wash-

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ington's and Hamilton's old party after the War of 1812. What the student of history wishes to know is whether the charge was accurate. . . . The old question still stands: were the memberships of the major parties dissimilar in their social and economic backgrounds?

It is very difficult to discern any significant differences in the social composition of Democratic and Whig party leaders. Of course the situation varied from state to state. The men at the helm of the Jacksonian party in Massachusetts, for example, were outsiders, politically, and of lower status than their opposite numbers in the other party, socially, in part because the wealth of Democratic leaders was in some cases only recently come by. Yet there were Bay State Whig leaders who were also nouveau. The "Conscience Whigs," who emerged with the heating up of the slavery issue and who became Free Soilers after the Mexican War, were for the most part of older family and higher social status than their more expedient Whig fellows. In that state the inveterately successful Whigs reigned as the party not only of old wealth but of practically every other social stratum as well. The slight but significant differences in the social tone of major party leadership there were due essentially to the domination of state politics by one party. Whether parvenus or not, David Henshaw and his circle,—typically bankers or members of the boards of directors of railroads and other businesses—were not poor men.

The top and "middle grade" leadership of New York State's Democratic party were not commonfolk. Rather they were men of wealth and high status, the social and economic equal of their Whig opposite numbers. New York City's Jacksonian leaders characteristically stressed their alleged plebeian backgrounds. In fact, many of them were either wealthy businessmen, merchants, and bankers, or prominent lawyers and doctors, members all of the city's "privileged aristocracy." In the other middle states the Democratic leadership was similarly in the hands of men of unusual wealth and prominence in business affairs.

In Michigan's strategic Wayne County, leaders of the two major parties, whether of the top, middle, or intermediate grades were essentially alike in their social and economic backgrounds. Lawyers and businessmen were to be found in roughly equal numbers in the Democratic and Whig top echelons. That they evidently mingled socially without regard to party suggests something of their view of the "great" party battles in their community. Differences there were in the elites of the parties but they had to do with religion, ethnic origins, the geographical backgrounds of the native-born and how long they had lived in their Michigan residences, not with wealth or occupation. In contrast to Kentucky, Democratic leaders were less foot-loose than their Whig counterparts. In common with other states, Michigan Whig leaders were more likely to be New Englanders and of that section's predominant Protestant denominations, less likely to be foreigners or Catholics than the Democrats. In contrast to Alabama, youth was no more a characteristic of the leadership of the one party than of the other.

The socioeconomic status of Jacksonian and Whig leaders has been most fully investigated for the southern states. Of course scholars of different persuasion will either interpret the same evidence differently or focus on different facts. Thus one study notes that Whig members of the Tennessee lower house were more than twice as likely as Democrats to be lawyers. A more recent examination of Tennessee's Congressmen finds that for all their ideological differences, the men of both parties were of roughly equal wealth and professional attainment. Despite the inevitable differences in viewpoint of the men engaged in the modern research, its most amazing feature is the essential similarity it discloses in the occupations, wealth and status of Whig and Jacksonian leaders. In Louisiana, "leaders in both parties were seemingly equal in wealth and education." North Carolina's Jacksonian leaders by the early 1830's were substantial eastern elements, rather than the frontiersmen and westerners who earlier had been influential. Mississippi's Democratic activists were for the most part successful men of affairs.

Florida's party leaders have been examined closely. The Democracy's chieftains may perhaps have owned less land and fewer slaves than their Whig colleagues. Yet the "nucleus," which constituted the original Jacksonian coalition of the early 1830's, was composed of speculators, planters, bankers, and professionals. True, many of these men later deserted the Jacksonian party for the Whigs. But the residue were not poor men. The Democratic party of 1838 to 1845 was made up of farmers and planters, large and small, with merchants, rural capitalists, and village entrepreneurs having "considerable weight" in its affairs. As in Massachusetts, newer and smaller merchants were more likely than the well-established ones to be Democrats. Yet 150 Democratic leaders in Florida, when subjected to a detailed analysis, proved to be unusually wealthy men. There were "a disproportionate number of them lawyers, relatively few yeoman farmers—fourteen percent—in contrast to planters who made up close to forty percent of the group, while merchants and manufacturers constituted twenty-five percent." For all the Whig demagoguery and Democratic counter-demagoguery about Jacksonian leveling and affinity for the poor, the "Democratic movement in Florida was certainly no lower-class manifestation of radicalism."

An exhaustive study of the socioeconomic and family backgrounds of the more than 1,000 Alabama Congressmen and State legislators for the period 1835 to 1856 found no important differences between Democrats and Whigs. A larger percentage of Democrats had gone to college; 47.6 percent of Democrats were planters in contrast to 34.5 percent of the Whigs. Slightly more than half of the representatives of each party were lawyers. The percentage of businessmen was about equal. A "slightly higher percentage of Whigs than Democrats" were professional men. As for religion, Methodists and Baptists abounded: there were "few Episcopalians in either party." A subsequent study of several hundred Whig and Democratic local activists in Alabama found a remarkable similarity in their situations. Occupations and religious denominations were alike while they owned equal amounts of real estate and were "strikingly similar in their pattern of slaveownership."

There is little doubt that the Whig Party in the South became increasingly preoccupied with banking and business issues or that its leadership included many wealthy merchants, bankers, and professional men. As the historians of an earlier day suggested, it was also a party dominated by the planter and slaveholder, in the language of one memorable characterization, "the broad cloth and silk stocking party." A stunning word picture of a later time depicted the typical Whig leader as the man in a silk hat nearby a Negro on a cotton bale. But the painstaking modern studies of Alabama and other southern states indicate that broadcloth and silk stockings were the badge not only of Whig party leadership; "the man in a silk hat nearby a Negro on a cotton bale was by no means necessarily a Whig."

In Missouri, too, the Jackson party leadership contained more slaveholders as well as the men who owned the largest numbers of slaves. Practically no Whigs owned more than 20 slaves. While Democratic leaders were wealthier and of higher status than the average Missourian, the leaders of the Whig party of that state were typically richer, more likely to be lawyers, slightly more likely to be businessmen, and while less likely to be farmers, more likely to claim large farms than the Jacksonians. Among the top leaders of the party, more than twice as many Whigs on the average had attended college—although the rate of college attendance among the Democracy's prominent figures was between 500 and 1,000 times the national average. In the city of St. Louis both parties typically put up extremely wealthy men for Mayor and middle-class persons for the Council, although Democrats did on occasion also nominate artisans to that body. On the level of "vigilance committees" or poll watchers, essentially similar patterns prevailed, although when tavern keepers and brewers are ranked as "businessmen," there is little to choose between the party faithful. The Democracy's local activists included 21 tavern keepers or brewers while the Whigs had none. Differences there were in the social and economic positions of Missouri's party leadership, but as John Vollmer Mering has observed, they were hardly those separating an "aristocracy" from a "proletariat."

There seems to be a widespread assumption that a party supported overwhelmingly by the poor or by whatever class, is the party of the poor or of the class that does support it. If this is taken to mean—as I think it often is—that a so-called party of the poor either truly serves them or that it deserves their support, then I think it is a false notion. It does not take into account the power of demagoguery or the gullibility of voters. To cite a drastic example, the fact that Hitler's party may have been supported by the German workers would hardly make the Nazis the party of the poor. American history, fortunately not yielding examples so dramatic as German, also affords illustrations of the point. McKinley's party would not be the party of the poor no matter how well it might do in working class electoral districts. The determination that the Democrats were the party of this or that group must finally be made not on the basis of statistics or the degree of electoral support the Democracy got from the group in question, but according to an evaluation of the party's behavior.

The complicated New York evidence revealed "that farmers, mechanics, and 'working classes' did not form the mainstay of the Democratic party." The Jacksonians' main support came not from "low-status socioeconomic groups," but rather from "relatively high-status socioeconomic groups in the eastern counties, and relatively low-status ethnocultural and religious groups in all sections of New York." Among natives, Jacksonians won small but significant majorities from "Old British," "Old German," "Dutch" and "Penn-Jerseyite" voters, and overwhelming majorities from "Catholic Irish," "French Canadian," "French" and "New German" immigrant groups. In the Empire State the Democracy attracted gamblers, bohemians, the free thinking, the free swearing. In showing that equally prosperous communities voted differently; that economically unlike communities produced strikingly similar party percentages; and the durability of party affiliations through all manner of changing economic circumstances that overtook given communities; Benson makes a shambles of the old simplistic notion that "voters vote by class."

Other detailed studies of voting in North Carolina and New York, counties in Pennsylvania and Tennessee, and of townships in New Jersey, have also demonstrated that the relative wealth or poverty of citizens seemed to have nothing to do with their party preferences. Poorer voters divided their votes among the two major parties in almost exactly the same proportions as their wealthier neighbors. Certain counties unbelievably registered exactly the same division of votes for the parties over the course of several elections, through thick and thin, despite socioeconomic changes in their electorates.

Not that the modern findings point only in one direction. In Georgia, Whig strength did appear to be greatest "where cotton growing and attendant activities were dominant interests" and in "those counties where investment in primary types of manufacturing and commercial ventures supplemented cotton growing." But as in Alabama the response in such communities came from men of all classes. An economic interpretation failed to account for the political sympathies of the many Georgians who simply admired the good sense of Whig appeals. Maryland politics may have been unideological but Jacksonian electoral support at first came from the old Republican—if not necessarily poor—districts of Baltimore and the western counties. Even T. P. Abernethy, as sharp a critic of the progressive interpretation of Jacksonian Democracy as any historian of the 20th century, conceded that in the Tennessee gubernatorial election of 1839, the "focal points of Whig strength . . . tended to radiate along the lines of communication." The Whig constituency in Florida lived in the "rich, earlier-settled, plantation areas" of middle Florida, while Democrats were in the "new, frontier, small farmer region of East and South Florida." The commercial centers, however, leaned toward the Democracy.

Less than one fifth of Missouri's 108 counties consistently voted Whig in presidential elections between 1836 and 1852. The Whigs of Thomas

Hart Benton's state were inveterate losers who as often as not chose not to run candidates. If one can therefore speak of characteristic Whig counties in such a state, he would note that they were relatively old or long-established, touched the Missouri or Mississippi river, contained unusually large farms, and were the more populous counties. (Of course many Democratic counties, in a state controlled by the Jacksonians, had similar traits.) That the Whig vote was high where slaveholding was great, does not substantiate the old Phillips-Cole thesis: John Mering, the modern historian of the Missouri party, cautions that "slavery and the interests it generated do not explain a Missouri county's Whiggery."

This tendency of relatively well-established, commercially active, "go ahead" communities to vote against Jackson has also been found to have been true in New Hampshire, at least in the presidential election of 1832. A "typical" Clay town in that state was old, prosperous, populous, connected to the outside world by many roads, near the ocean, possessed of a lively newspaper, great buildings, and a couple of Congregationalist churches: Jackson towns—and one had recently changed its name from Adams to Jackson!—were isolated, poor, "out of the mainstream" of New Hampshire life, sparsely populated, and had no church or perhaps one church, the Free Will Baptist. Small upland villages on poor soil worked by small farmers, with the exception of one district of 16 towns whose Clay vote has recently been interpreted as due to its relative prosperity and its proximity to the world outside and to areas of former Federalist influence, voted overwhelmingly for Old Hickory. The correlation between religious denomination and voting appears to have been greater than any other. For in addition to the "exceptional" Clay upland towns running from Sullivan to Amherst, the next to the poorest town in the state voted for Clay, while the second wealthiest went for Jackson by two to one. But the latter were exceptions to the New Hampshire pattern. For that matter any anti-Democratic voting seems to have been exceptional in a state whose "Concord Regency," led by the redoubtable Isaac Hill and Levi Woodbury, "had been electing Democratic Governors and Congressmen by wide margins since 1829."

Michigan voting late in the Jackson era, certainly in the towns and villages of Wayne County, sharply contradicts the older version of the nature of the major party electorates. Middle and lower-class persons who made up the great bulk of the electorate divided their votes, without reference to class, more or less equally among Democrats and Whigs. That towns were populated either by "rural lower classes" or by large proportions of "prosperous, middle-class farmers" was no clue to their political preferences. As in Lee Benson's New York, towns with similar social patterns differed sharply in their voting behavior while towns whose social elements were markedly unlike nevertheless exhibited similar voting patterns. No discernible correlations existed between economic status and party choice. The most striking correlations rather were to be found between ethnic identity and party, style of life and party, and above all between religion and party. Yankees, for ex-

ample, tended only slightly to be Whigs, but Yankee Presbyterians, decisively. Evangelical sects were overwhelmingly Whig; Catholics, whether Irish or French, were Democrats. The ethnic patterns were also similar to New York State's, as were the relationships between life style and voting. Hedonists were Jacksonian; the God fearing, Whig.

In Kentucky, at least in 1828, Jackson seemed to do unusually well in "counties with high rates of population growth," and with men who had been active in the old Relief movement—albeit the latter movement was led by many well-to-do men who became repudiationists out of temporary need rather than compassion for poor debtors. In Virginia in 1828 both the Tidewater and Piedmont, "strongholds of conservative views," went heavily for Jackson. In North Carolina the Democratic party's social and geographical bases did not conform to the traditional ideas about them. Democratic strength in that state was not on the frontier but in "the North-Central counties and in the East." Democratic majorities were large in districts where slavery was most prominent. In a word, voting patterns were varied, sometimes contradictory, and give little support to the theory that clear-cut class lines divided Whig from Jacksonian voters. . . .

The closest thing to a classic ideological party in the entire antebellum period, the Working Men burst forth like a political meteor only to fall to earth in the space of a few years. Following the creation of the Philadelphia Working Men's party in 1828, groups sprang up all over the country. The modern discussion, focusing as it does on a few major cities, has perhaps obscured what Helen Sumner, one of the pioneer labor researchers working with John R. Commons, long ago discovered: the ubiquitousness of the movement. In fact recent investigations show it to have been even more widespread than Miss Sumner imagined. Operating under a variety of names, "Working Men's Parties," "Working Men's Republican Associations," "People's Parties," "Working Men's Societies," "Farmers' and Mechanics' Societies," "Mechanics and Other Working Men," and just plain "Working Men," appeared in most of the states of the Union. They took shape in such communities as Carlisle, Pennsylvania; Glens Falls, New York; Caldwell, New Jersey; Zanesville, Ohio; Dedham, Massachusetts; Lyme, Connecticut; and Calais, Vermont; as well as in such centers as New York City, St. Louis, Boston, Newark, and Philadelphia.

Almost every one of these organizations had its own press. These journals, most unlike the Regency's Albany Argus or the Whig Columbian Centinel in Boston, contained, in addition to accounts of Working Men's activities in their own and other cities and the usual advertisements and literary excerpts that then characterized journalism, "a spectrum of reform, from Pestalozzian educational ideas and cooperative store suggestions to the views of free thinkers and reprints from [English socialist] works." Typically edited by leaders of the new party, they provide the fullest contemporary account of what the Working Men's movement was about.

Many questions have been raised about the Working Men's party, the

most important having to do with its authenticity. "Decayed Federal dances!" not true workmen, charged a New England journal, while at other times proto-Whig editors bitterly stamped the new organizations a mere front for the Democracy. The evidence is complicated, often contradictory, and suggests the wisdom of careful examination of the facts relating to each group before coming to conclusions as to whether they truly represented artisans and mechanics. According to Miss Sumner the issue that separated legitimate Working Men from fraudulent was the protective tariff. In some cases, she wrote, "advocates of a protective tariff assumed without warrant the popular name—'mechanics and working men.'" She suspected that these "associations of so-called workmen which favored protection generally avoided committing themselves to the usual demands of the Working Men's party." But let the organization be silent on protection and approve the "usual demands" and her study accepted its *bona fides*. Modern scholars have been more skeptical and with good reason. For as one of them wrote, after noting the great wealth of the Philadelphia Working Men's candidates for office, "to believe that [such] a party . . . was really devoted to solving working class problems in the interests of the workers would seem to lay a heavy tax on credulity." And yet the record is clear: the Philadelphia Working Men's Party was no misnomer.

The party arose out of a decision by the city's Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations to enter into politics, in order to promote "the interests and enlightenment of the working classes." There can be no question of the authenticity of this latter group, "the first union of all the organized workmen of any city." Consisting of individual unions—or societies as they were then called—of journeymen bricklayers, painters, glaziers, typographers, house carpenters, and other craftsmen, its main purpose was to provide financial support to journeymen striking against their masters. An amendment to this Mechanics' Union's constitution, in 1828, provided that three months prior to the forthcoming elections, the membership should "nominate as candidates for public office such individuals as shall pledge themselves . . . to support and advance . . . the interests and enlightenment of the working classes." Shortly thereafter the *Mechanic's Free Press*, edited by a young Ricardian socialist, William Heighton, reported that "at a very large and respectable meeting of Journeymen House Carpenters held on Tuesday evening, July 1st . . . the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations is entering into measures for procuring a nomination of candidates for legislative and other public offices, who will support the interest of the working classes." Thus was born the Philadelphia Working Men's party, in the promise made by journeymen workers to support at the polls individuals sympathetic to—not necessarily members of—the working class.

New York City's Working Men made their appearance in 1829 when their candidates for the State Assembly made a remarkable showing. Some contemporaries and later scholars alike explained this new party as nothing more than anti-Tammany dissidents, born out of "the bitter internal dis-

sensions and schisms that were wrecking the Republican party of New York." The fact remains that the decision to run candidates on a separate Working Men's ticket was made at a meeting of mechanics on October 19, 1829, in agreement with the proposal by the executive body—the "Committee of Fifty." A number of journeymen's meetings held in April had created this Committee. Its purpose was to combat "all attempts to compel journeymen mechanics to work more than ten hours a day." It would seem that at least in its origins the New York Working Men's party was indubitably a response of workers to a threatened attack on their working conditions.

For Boston the evidence is not clear, for all the press unhappiness with the new party or the impressionistic recording by a journalist present at early meetings of the Working Men's party in the summer of 1830. He wrote that they were attended by large numbers of men who, "from appearance, were warm from their workshops and from other places of daily toil, but who bore on their countenances convictions of their wrongs, and a determination to use every proper means to have them redressed." Two years later New England workmen and their friends formed the New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics, and Other Working Men, described as a "new type of labor organization, in part economic and in part political." This interesting organization was preoccupied with trying to achieve for New England's workers what remained a will-o'-the-wisp for most of the era—the 10 hour day. Its failures do not detract from its authenticity.

Logic as well as the historical record suggest the essential validity and independence from other political groupings of the Working Men's party—at least at its birth. The new party was a form of rejection by its members of both the Jacksonians and their major opponents. The Working Men stood for programs and called for changes in American society not dreamed of by the pragmatists at the helm of the major parties. And in view of the relatively small followings of the new organizations for all their idealism—or was it because of it?—it strains credulity to attribute to shrewd Jacksonian manipulators the formation of ostensibly single-class political organizations that exasperated both the business community and those many Americans of whatever class who under no circumstances wished to think of themselves as workers. . . .

The parties' real leaders are best studied not for their social and economic backgrounds, which were in fact diverse, but for their ideas and personal force, which actually accounted for their leadership. Unlike their contemporaries in the major parties these men were indeed radicals, certainly for this phase of their careers. There was nothing politic in adhering to essentially socialistic doctrines that most of the press savagely excoriated. Beliefs such as theirs, going beyond the patent demagoguery of the day, could find no expression in the programs of the era's major parties. As to the party's rank and file constituency, apart from the sparkling successes achieved in Philadelphia and New York in 1829, it does not seem ever to have been very great. On the other hand, particularly in the latter city but in Boston,

too, what electoral support it got did come primarily from poorer or working-class wards. In New York City its candidates got close to 50 percent of the vote of the five poorest wards while averaging only about 20 percent in the wealthier districts.

Their program was amazingly similar, with substantially the same measures advocated in most of the western and southern cities, as well as in New Jersey, Delaware, and New England, as were advocated in Philadelphia and New York. The original Philadelphia demands became the nucleus of the Working Men's program everywhere. They called above all for free, tax-supported school system of high quality to replace the stigmatized "pauper schools." Stephen Simpson, brilliant and unreliable one-time Jacksonian, was nominated to office by the Philadelphia Working Men and became a leading figure in the movement mainly because of his advanced educational ideas. In addition, the masthead of the *Mechanic's Free Press* urged abolition of imprisonment for debt; abolition of all licensed monopolies; an entire revision or abolition of the prevailing militia system; a less expensive legal system; equal taxation on property; no legislation on religion; and a district system of elections. The paper's columns also pressed vigorously for a mechanics' lien law to assure workers first claim to the employers' payroll, shorter hours, better working conditions, and constantly urged improved housing for workers. The major parties were regularly denounced as were city fathers who administered the city by a double standard, failing either to provide sufficient "hydrant water for the accommodation of the poor" or "to clean the streets in the remote sections of the city where the working-men reside." Political action was not considered at odds with economic, by the Working Men's leaders, for they strongly favored creation of unions. Nor does this exhaust the list even of the Philadelphia issues.

The movements in other cities added dozens of other grievances. The New York party went so far as to call for "equal property to all adults" in its early stages when the radical Thomas Skidmore was its leading figure. When he was cashiered out of the party at the end of its first year by the opportunists who had infiltrated it, with the acquiescence of the more innocent Robert Dale Owen and George Henry Evans, even the latter continued to insist, in the party's official organ, that it continued to stand for Skidmore's principles; it had only modified its tactics for achieving them. The Owen-Evans faction of the party stressed the need for a revamped educational system featured by "state guardianship" or the boarding out of working-class children in publicly-supported schools. Regional variations might call for a reform in land tenure laws or, as in the case of the New England Association, insistence on factory legislation. Abolition of capital punishment and prison reform were popular demands everywhere. In sum, Working Men's parties were champions of a great variety of political, social, economic, and educational reforms. That much of the program was not of a "bread and butter" character or that the victims of some grievances were not confined to the "laboring poor" are not valid grounds for skepticism. For it

would be a most doctrinaire economic determinism indeed that insisted that authentic labor organizations confine their programs to economic issues. In that era when the diverse and youthful American labor movement was very much influenced by the radical English model, and when American workmen were as much concerned with enhanced status and educational opportunity as with material gains, organizations speaking for labor quite naturally reflected this breadth of interest. Short-term, pitifully organized affairs for the most part, a major function of the new organizations was not to win elections so much as to call attention to the gamut of abuses bearing most heavily on the nation's working people.

The Working Men were essentially independent of the major parties although from time to time they cooperated with them. Certainly in choosing candidates they paid little attention to the previous political preferences of a nominee who was sound on an important Working Men's principle. At times, particularly during the Bank War, they cooperated closely with the Jacksonians. Stephen Simpson's refusal to issue a blanket condemnation of the "monster bank" infuriated many of his one-time admirers. The regular support given the Democracy by the Newark Working Men, their tendency, if not to hold joint nominating conventions, then to hold them on the same date and in the same town, and to approve closely similar lists of candidates, did not fail to draw the condemnation of the anti-Jacksonian press.

The New York City party broke into three pieces shortly after its 1829 success, the largest splinter supporting and subsequently being absorbed into the New York State Democratic party. New England's Working Men in 1833 threw their support in the gubernatorial campaign to Samuel Clesson Allen, champion of Andrew Jackson and enemy to Nicholas Biddle. Evidence of Working Men's collaboration with anti-Jacksonians however, as in Philadelphia, is as easily come by. When the New England Association again nominated Allen in 1834 it condemned the candidates of both major parties. Working Men of most New Jersey towns and cities typically had as little to do with Democrats as with their opponents, while even in Newark the romance was not a lasting one. It was punctuated finally by a falling out in 1836. Most of the Working Men's leaders even when cooperating with the Democrats on a particular issue, never ceased warning that the Jackson party was no different from the Clay, no more concerned with the real problems of working people.

Future studies of the Working Men's party are likely only to accentuate what previous work has disclosed: how hard it is to generalize about the movement as a whole. For as I have elsewhere noted, "there were Working Men and Working Men. The origin of some was obscure; of others, dubious. Some arose out of economic struggles, others out of concern for status. Some came to be dominated by opportunists, other by zealots." The significant common feature of the movement as a whole was its authenticity—at least for part of its history. I regard it authentic because the parties seem to have been formed by workers and men devoted to their interests, and concerned themselves with the cause and welfare of workers.

influence the major parties into like concern. Of course the parties contained many men who by present standards would not qualify as workers. The definition of that day was less restrictive. George Henry Evans for example seemed to regard only "lawyers, bankers, and brokers as disqualified for membership." The equally radical William Heighon advised his Philadelphia party that "an employer [who] superintends his business" but "works with his own hands is a workingman." A movement in need of all the membership it could get would not permit a Skidmore to narrow down further its small chances for growth by establishing uncompromising standards for participation. The typical resolution of this problem was to ask few questions about the social position of any individual who in Heighon's words, was "willing to join us in obtaining our objects." But of course such an approach created additional problems.

In New York City, for example, by 1830 elements which not only were not themselves of the working class but which had little sympathy with its aspirations succeeded in taking over the party by the use of money, intrigue, and extralegal tactics that denied the floor to opposition, all the while paying lip service to the party program. There was nothing to prevent special pleaders from calling meetings designed to further their objects while masquerading under the banner of the new party. Much of the nation's press, Democratic and National Republican alike, nevertheless persisted in taking a dim view of a party whose own press constantly reminded its readers that this was a class society. "The very pretension to the necessity of such a party is a libel on the community," protested the editors of the *Boston Courier*. Shortly afterwards Edward Everett pressed home the point that rich and poor alike, all are workingmen. What need was there for a separate Working Men's party? Parties nevertheless insisted on forming, in the City of Brotherly Love obtaining the balance of power by their second electoral try, in New York winning better than 6,000 out of 21,000 votes cast in their initial effort. And yet their success was decidedly ephemeral.

Most of the Working Men's parties disappeared within five years of their birth. Among the many factors responsible for their downfall, newspaper denunciation, internal dissension in some cases introduced by infiltrators intent on taking over the party, doctrinal squabbles by party zealots, the hostility of the major parties, the increasing prosperity which, according to Miss Sumner, turned the attention of workers from "politics to trade unionism," the inexperience of their leadership, and not least the absorption of some of their program by the major parties, all played their part. Parties which sharply delineated the social and economic cleavages and disparities besetting American society on the one hand were offensive to those Americans used to more cheerful assessment, and on the other were inevitably attacked by men, newspapers, and political parties possessed of far more money, experience, and influence. And a political system which rewarded only winners of majorities or pluralities was not conducive to the perpetuation of such a movement.

cant phenomenon. They played an important part in the achievement of a number of the era's reforms. Particularly outstanding was their contribution to the movement for a democratic and public educational system. They agitated not only for broadened opportunities for the poor but for surprisingly sophisticated modifications in curriculum and teacher training. A final significance of the movement was its indirect testimony that even in the age of optimism, speculation, and major party demagoguery, a significant number of Americans were disenchanted with their society and responsive to the voice of radical dissent. . . .

On the national level, particularly in 1844, and on the local and state levels throughout the era, a number of the third parties at times held the balance of political power. In view of the nearly equal followings of the great major parties, a minor party whose own voting support was minuscule could nevertheless manage to determine the outcome of an election. The major significance of the dissenting parties however was in other things than their occasional fateful effect on the party battles between the giants. Their very existence highlighted the nonideological nature of the Democracy and Whiggery. The absorption of parts of their program and their memberships by the major parties was one more revelation of the political knowhow of the latter. Small memberships and highly localized centers of support testified to the indifference most American voters felt toward the politics of principle and zeal. For if the very existence of third parties showed that the Jacksonian consensus was not universally subscribed to, the most revealing feature of the situation was how few Americans dissented from it.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s book *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1945), a portion of which is reprinted here, deserves to be read in its entirety. A critical review by Bray Hammond may be found in *Journal of Economic History*, 6 (May 1946), pp. 79-84. Hammond's important book, from which the selection here has been taken, also deserves careful attention by any serious student: *Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, N.J., 1957). John William Ward finds that the image of Jackson helped to define a consensus in his **Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1955). Richard Hofstadter's chapter on Andrew Jackson in his **American Political Tradition* (New York, 1948) is a perceptive and subtle interpretation in the consensus tradition. The notion of paradox appears in Marvin Meyers's book **The Jacksonian Persuasion* (Stanford, 1957). A very different view may be found in Michael A. Lebowitz, "The Jacksonians: Paradox Lost?" in Barton J. Bernstein, ed., **Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York, 1968), pp. 65-89. Lebowitz argues that Jackson appealed to "farmers in relatively declining regions."

Edward Pessen, **Jacksonian America: Society, Personality and Politics* (Homewood, Ill., 1969) summarizes most of the recent research and emerges with a balanced but generally consensus interpretation. Lee Benson, **The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, N.J., 1961)

argues on the basis of much statistical evidence that the concept of Jacksonian democracy has little validity. Politics are the concern of Herbert Erskowitz and William C. Shade, "Consensus or Conflict? Political Behavior in the State Legislatures during the Jacksonian Era," *Journal of American History*, 8 (December 1971), pp. 591-621. They conclude that party differences "represented contrasting belief systems" and that political battles concerned far more than "the spoils of office," a view that challenges, among others, Richard P. McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1966).

A good collection of some of the interesting new research is Edward Pessen, ed., **New Perspectives on Jacksonian Parties and Politics* (Boston, 1969). Other good general works on the subject are Robert V. Remini, **The Election of Andrew Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1963), and Glyndon G. Van Deusen, **The Jacksonian Era* (New York, 1959). Both contain useful bibliographies. Michael Paul Rogin, **Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York, 1975), is a psychological interpretation.

Among the many discussions of economic changes taking place during this period are Stuart Bruchey, **The Roots of American Economic Growth, 1607-1861* (New York, 1968); Douglass C. North, **The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790 to 1860* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961); and George Rogers Taylor, **The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York, 1951). A sociological survey is Richard D. Brown, **Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600-1865* (New York, 1976).

Two useful historiographic essays on Jacksonian politics are Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., "Andrew Jackson versus the Historians," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 44 (March 1958), pp. 615-34 and Ronald P. Formisano, "Toward a Reorientation of Jacksonian Politics: A Review of the Literature, 1959-1975," *Journal of American History*, 63 (June 1976), pp. 42-65.

* Available in paperback edition.